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Restaurant News®

THE NEWSWEEKLY OF THE FOODSERVICE INDUSTRY

SECOND CLASS

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NRN Photo

Vinci's chef-owner Paul and Kathy LoDuca.

Mama mia! Wave of trattorias sweeps Windy City

by Carolyn Walkup

CHICAGO — Just when it seemed that everyone who wanted to open an Italian restaurant in Chicago had done so, a whole new crop is sprouting up and seeds for even more are germinating.

The newcomers claim to feature authentic, simple dishes at moderate prices. Menus emphasize pastas and appetizers, rather than the heavier entrée dishes common in higher-end Italian restaurants around town.

Among the new openings are such trattorias as Centro, owned by Alex Dana; Trattoria Grazie, owned by Graziano Buzzi, former manager of the Chicago Bice; and Vinci, owned by chef Paul LoDuca and his

(See ITALIAN, page 48)

IFMA forecast: No end to sales woes in '92

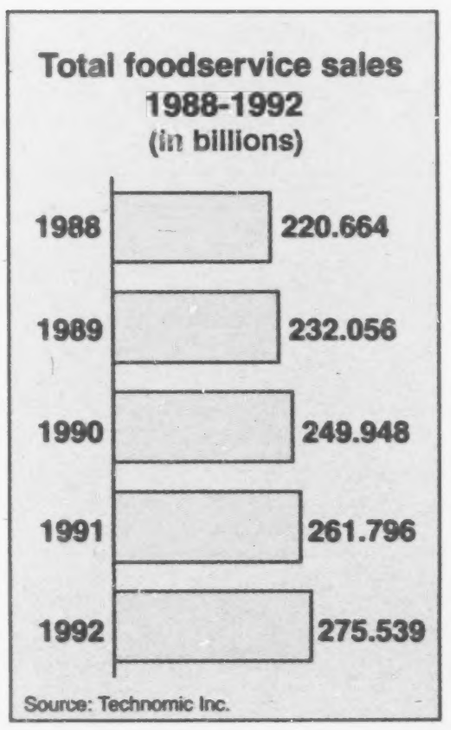
by Peter Romeo

NEW YORK — Foodservice operators looking for a quick rebound from this year's sales slowdown will see their hopes dashed in 1992 by a continuing sluggishness in consumer spending, according to a forecast just issued by a major industry association.

To make matters worse, the International Foodservice Manufacturers Association predicted that a significant portion of next year's slight sales gain will flow to new competitors of traditional foodservice outlets. Sales at supermarket delicatessens, for instance, are expected to grow at four times the rate of increase for the industry as a whole.

Overall, IFMA predicted, foodservice sales will rise by 1.5 percent in 1992, to $275.54 billion. That signals a slight upturn from the projected 1991 increase of 0.9 percent, to $261.80 billion.

But "remember, this is total industry sales, and new stores are continuing to open," observed Dennis J. Lombardi, executive vice president of Technomic Inc., the research



house that generated the IFMA data. "The impact on one existing store could be even worse."

At an IFMA seminar here, Lombardi explained that the number of domestic foodservice outlets would likely rise next year by more than 1.5 percent, meaning that a significantly greater number of competitors will be vying for a slice of only a slightly larger pie.

"This is not a growth industry," Lombardi told the audience of foodservice suppliers here.

"Most operators are either flat or down," remarked Ron Paul, Technomic president. "Flat is probably considered pretty good."

Technomic executives attributed the industry's difficulties to a weak economic environment. They noted that the nation's recessionary slide put hundreds of thousands of potential foodservice patrons out of work in 1990 and '91. Other consumers curtailed their spending as a hedge against the possibility of losing their jobs.

"Clearly our industry is feeling the impact of consumers' fears brought on by the recession," Lombardi explained.

The speakers asserted that economic conditions have improved in recent months.

"The economy is getting better," said Robert Goldin, senior principal of Technomic. "It is by no means robust. But it is

(See IFMA, page 49)

Family restaurant chains unveil fall menu offerings

Add new items, daypart programs to boost traffic

by Bill Carlino

Family restaurant operators are kicking off their fall seasons with a promotional harvest of new menu items and meal programs.

Players like Denny's, Bob Evans Farms, JB's Restaurants, Perkins, Country Kitchen and International House of Pancakes are either introducing new products or resurrecting seasonal favorites to bolster traffic during targeted dayparts.

The added items range from such uncharacteristic selections as Bayou Cajun Pasta and chicken stir fry to such "comfort" favorites as chicken pot pie, liver and onions, and meat loaf. Some are clearly intended to bolster lunch and dinner traffic.

"Many family restaurants have had a lot of difficulty breaking away from that breakfast stereotype," said Gary Bales, vice president of marketing for the 140-unit JB's Restaurants.

But in JB's case, he continued, "we're just the opposite. We've built a strong lunch and dinner following, but now we want to position ourselves as having a quality image at breakfast, too."

In a return to its self-described "breakfast heritage,"

(See FAMILY, page 4)

Fine-dining group finalizes program for rating awards

by Carolyn Walkup

CHICAGO — Distinguished Restaurants of North America, a group of about 550 former Travel/Holiday magazine fine-dining award winners, has finalized details for a program members expect will become "the gold standard of restaurant awards."

Tom Margittai, co-owner of The Four Seasons in New York and the incoming DRNA chairman, unveiled the program during the group's first reunion under its new banner here.

DRNA was established last year in Toronto to protest a change in the procedures and standards of choosing Travel/Holiday award winners. Before that, the group had traditionally met annually in different cities, primarily to socialize and network.

"Nothing is going to do what this can do to elevate fine dining in North America," Margittai declared. "This program will sort out the chaos that confuses the consumer."

Margittai explained that judges for the awards would consist of faculty and alumni from Cornell University's School of Hotel Administration in Ithaca, N.Y. The first winners will be announced in the June 1992 issue of Food & Wine magazine.

American Express, which owns Food & Wine, has provided seed money to launch the awards program. Most of the funds will be used to pay the in-

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NEWS BRIEFS

KFC suspends introduction of Skinfree Crispy

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — Kentucky Fried Chicken is suspending the rollout of its Skinfree Crispy fried-chicken, citing disappointing profits and product consistency.

KFC's parent, PepsiCo, took a $9 million pretax write-off for halting the introduction. In announcing the move, PepsiCo indicated that suppliers would be paid for unrecovered start-up costs and underused production capacity. Twenty-five percent of patrons ordered the item where it was available, but the product's profit margin was smaller than the level for KFC's other chicken selections, said Steve Provost, KFC's vice president of public affairs.

"We'll give it a shot next year" after a slight reformulation, he said.

The reduced-calorie product, which KFC had eyed as a surefire means of luring more health-conscious consumers, is currently available in about 2,000 of 5,000 domestic units.

Hermann resigns as Rax president; successor named

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Rax Restaurants has named William Underhill president, succeeding Ira Hermann, who resigned.

Hermann, the former Arby's chief operating officer who joined Rax two and one-half years ago, said he left to pursue other interests.

Earlier this year, Hermann was part of an investment group that acquired a majority stake in the struggling company. The group was led by Donald Karas, now chairman.

"I felt that I'd accomplished all that I could, and that now with the deal done and Don [Karas] and Bill [Underhill] in place, it was time to move on," Hermann remarked.

Under Hermann, Rax closed several unprofitable restaurants, sold its headquarters building and significantly trimmed its corporate payroll in efforts to cut losses.

Sales rise; food costs, menu prices flatten in August

WASHINGTON — Sales at the nation's eating and drinking places hit their second-highest peak of the year last month, rising in August by 5.2 percent on an annual, unadjusted basis, while food costs and menu prices flattened, according to the government's leading economic reports.

The Census Bureau's monthly retail sales report showed that only May's 5.4-percent upswing topped the August mark thus far this year.

Menu prices, meanwhile, flattened in August, capping off a five-month trend, up just 0.1 percent, to 3.3 percent, on an annual basis, according to the Labor Department's Consumer Price Index.

When the 5.2-percent gain in restaurant sales is discounted against the 3.3-percent rise in menu prices, restaurant traffic apparently rose in August 1.9 percent, a modest gain but one of the biggest this year.

Wholesale food costs, or the finished consumer foods category of the PPI, declined 1.2 percent in August from the figure for the same month last year, the department reported.

Pizza Hut eyes hospital as site for second Cafe

WICHITA, Kan. — Looking to expand its newest operation, Pizza Hut is negotiating to open a second Pizza Hut Cafe as part of the cafeteria feeding operation of the 625-bed Wesley Medical Center.

In addition to including some menu items from Pizza Hut Cafe, the facility would also offer selections from the company's Pizza Hut Express concept in a counter-service-only arrangement, according to spokesman Roger Rydell. He said the facility could open as early as November.

Currently overseeing the hospital's foodservice is Latour Management, a local company that was key in helping to develop the Pizza Hut Cafe concept.

McD adds wings to promotional products arsenal

OAK BROOK, Ill. — Following the lead of other fast feeders, McDonald's has added spicy chicken wings to its arsenal of short-term-promotional products.

The hamburger giant's version, called Mighty Wings, is offered at selected units in orders of five and 10. The peppery, deep-fried finger food is served with a Louisiana hot sauce.

Roy Rogers, Kentucky Fried Chicken and a number of other quick-service powerhouses have been using Buffalo-style chicken wings as a limited-time customer draw for months.

TCBY secures license to sell Mrs. Fields items

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. — TCBY Enterprises' franchise subsidiary, TCBY Systems, has entered a master license agreement with Mrs. Fields Development to sell certain Mrs. Fields products in TCBY stores.

Details of the agreement were not disclosed.

In a marketing test, TCBY stores in central Arkansas have been selling Mrs. Fields cookies, muffins and brownies since July. That arrangement will be expanded to 750 stores during the first year, TCBY said.

Penguin's Place frozen-yogurt chain files for Ch. 11

LOS ANGELES — Penguin's Place Inc., the franchisor of Southern California's dominant frozen-yogurt chain, has filed a Chapter 11 bankruptcy petition, declaring assets of $2 million and liabilities of $6.1 million.

Officials of the Thousand Oaks, Calif.-based firm, which owns five outlets and franchises 118 others, said sales slippage for the last three years forced it to seek court protection from creditors. Blaming the recession, this year's unusually cool summer and growing competition from fast-food restaurants and supermarkets, the company said systemwide sales fell 9 percent last year, to $29 million, and would drop another 10 percent this year, to about $26 million.

Chain officials said reorganization plans include store-lease renegotiations, a shift from print-ad to direct-mail marketing, and the introductions of more yogurt and topping flavors.

Daka to sell hotels to Vince

WAKEFIELD, Mass. — Daka International, a diversified foodservice company here, has agreed to sell its four-unit Sovereign Hotels operation to Terry Vince, the company's former chief executive, for 7 million shares of Daka stock currently held by him.

The shares have an approximate value of $5 million and represent 19 percent of total shares outstanding.

Shares rendered by Vince will be retired by the company. Vince will still hold 4.8 percent of Daka's outstanding stock. The deal will reduce Daka's mortgage debt by $8.5 million.

Tri-state coalition nabs top prize at Seafood Challenge

MOBILE, Ala. — A culinary foursome representing Ohio, Texas and West Virginia won a narrow victory over the best chefs from Georgia and Florida in the final round of the 1991 Gulf of Mexico Seafood Challenge here.

The Tri-State Co-op's team was captained by Columbus, Ohio-based Hartmut Handke of Handke's Cuisine and staffed by Victor Gielisse and Henri Mahler from Actuelle Restaurant and Loew's Anatole Hotel, both in Dallas, and Scott Bennett of The Greenbrier in White Sulphur Springs, W.Va. The team's winning score was just one-tenth of a point higher than those of the second and third place finishes scored by Tom Catherall's Team-Georgia and the Central Florida Chefs, led by Major Jarman.

The top seafood menu featured a seared and baked herb-marinated amberjack entrée with basil mashed potatoes, an oven-roasted tomato soup with fish dumplings and a smoked flounder fillet with potato pancake and vegetable relish.

All three teams captured gold medals in the American Culinary Federation-sanctioned event. Fourth-place finishers — Team Louisiana and Team Harpoon Louie's from Jupiter, Fla. — won silver medals.

NEWS

Bias allegations spur probe of Red Onion

by Richard Martin

LOS ANGELES — The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors has demanded an investigation of the Red Onion chain's role in an incident at a restaurant in Orange County in which three Japanese women customers were allegedly assaulted by a group of Caucasian women customers.

Following complaints that one of the Japanese women suffered a split lip after being punched and kicked by an attacker who told her to "speak English," the board approved supervisor Kenneth Hahn's motion calling for the Orange County District Attorney and the human-relations commissions of Los Angeles and Orange counties to assess the policies of the 15-unit Mexican dinner-house chain.

Officials of International Onion Inc., Red Onion's Carson, Calif.-based owner, denied any wrongdoing. "We told our people to cooperate fully" with a police investigation, said Stephen W. Solomon, the company's attorney. He called the incident "unfortunate" but said it was "between patrons and [did] not [involve] the Red Onion."

Calling the alleged assault in the Huntington Beach Red Onion "a clear and blatant violation" of the civil rights of the Japanese customers, Hahn said management of the restaurant reportedly ignored their requests for assistance and was implicated in the alleged intimidation of a witness.

Hahn said the incident was especially significant because of prior allegations of discrimination against the chain, which is based in Los Angeles County and operates throughout Southern California.

In 1986 Red Onion offered apologies and promised to implement reforms after facing numerous charges of racial bias in its disco-admissions policies. State liquor-licensing and fair-employment authorities investigated the chain after dozens of customers filed discrimination suits, several of which were later settled for undisclosed amounts.

> The company's attorney, called the incident "unfortunate" but said it was "between patrons and [did] not [involve] the Red Onion."

Citing "other troublesome and disturbing circumstances that underscore the need for a thorough investigation," Hahn introduced an allegation by the Asian Pacific American Legal Center that Red Onion management had coerced a bartender into rescinding his pledge to be a witness to the attack.

"No witnesses, no evidence, no fight," Red Onion bouncers were quoted as saying.

Solomon denied that any witnesses had been intimidated.

Robert Kawahara, an attorney representing the Japanese women, said they are contemplating a civil suit against the chain because of alleged "inaction" by its officials, regardless of whether any coercion of the bartender could be substantiated. "We feel [management's] course of conduct and attitude encourage this type of incident," Kawahara said.

"The perpetrators of the attack were left to drink," while the restaurant's managers shunned the Japanese women and failed to call the police immediately, according to Kathy Imahara, an attorney for the Asian Pacific American Legal Center, which initially counseled the Japanese women.

Red Onion officials should be faulted because "they did not recognize the racial nature of the attack," Imahara said.

A spokesman for supervisor Hahn said the board of supervisors would not take further action until it receives a report from the human-relations commissions of the two counties.

Family chains roll out fall fare to boost sales

(Continued from page 1)

the Salt-Lake City-based JB's is gearing up for an October launch of "Project Sunrise," a line of international-style omelets and an array of frittatas, pancake-shaped egg preparations cooked on both sides but not folded like omelets.

Bales said the cooked-to-order items of Project Sunrise will complement the chain's breakfast bar, a $3.69 all-you-can-eat alternative to JB's à la-carte morning menu. The frittatas and omelets are priced between $4.99 and $5.29

Meanwhile, in a similar attempt to bolster breakfast sales, the 500-unit IHOP chain is engaged in a systemwide rollout of two types of Belgian waffles. One is made with buttermilk batter; the other, with the chain's Harvest Grain 'n' Nut batter, a blend of five whole grains, English walnuts and pecans.

The waffles are priced at $3.89 to $4.39.

"These [waffles] will be the Cadillac among our pancakes and waffle items," said Steve Pettise senior vice president of marketing for IHOP. The Buttermilk Belgian waffle is currently in about 220 units, while the Harvest Grain 'N' Nut version has made its way onto the menu of 80 restaurants, Pettise added.

In addition to rolling out new breakfast lines, JB's is attempting to draw more lunch and dinner patrons with a troika of pasta dishes marketed under the banner "A touch of Italy."

The entrées — Pasta Primavera, Bayou Cajun Pasta and Chicken Marinara — range in price from $5.49 to $6.49.

In similar efforts to lure lunch and dinner traffic, Bob Evans, Perkins and Country Kitchen have unveiled an array of complete entrées.

Bob Evans, an operation known for its red and white farmhouse exterior and retail sausage line, is seeking to fuel evening sales with a current systemwide rollout of Daily Dinner Specials.

On weekday nights Bob Evans Farms will feature one entrée from a roster of five new menu selections, each priced less than $6.

On Mondays each unit throughout the Bob Evans Farms system will feature chicken pot pie. Tuesday's special will be liver and onions; Wednesday's, an open-faced roast beef sandwich; Thursday's, turkey and dressing; and Friday's, lasagna filled with Bob Evans' proprietary Italian sausage.

"We've been working on building our dinner business for about 10 years now,' said Roger Williams, senior vice president of marketing for Bob Evans Farms, adding that dinner accounts for about 45 percent of sales.

According to Williams, Bob Evans began testing the Daily Dinner Specials in 26 restaurants in Indianapolis and Toledo, Ohio.

"We felt these [markets] were representative of the Bob Evans chain," Williams explained. "The entrées met our testing criteria with regard to sales and what we call 'intent to reorder.'" Williams said that as a result, same-store sales in the testing units rose by 10 percent.

To tout the Daily Dinner Specials, Bob Evans plans to use a block of five 30-second spots in its most heavily penetrated markets. Williams explained that the spots will be rotated daily. For example, a late-night viewer on Tuesday night would see the commercial plugging Bob Evans' Wednesday dinner special.

Perkins, a 415-unit operation, is poised to launch "Down Home Favorites," a line of entrées priced in the $5-$6 range.

Scheduled to kick off in late October, Perkins will offer new items like pot roast, chicken and dumplings, and meat loaf, while simultaneously recycling often-requested dishes like chicken pot pie and shepherd's pie.

"These are basically cold-weather items," explained Sue Hernandez, Perkins' vice president of marketing. She added that the promotion will run through early winter.

Country Kitchen, the 250-unit family restaurant subsidiary of the Minneapolis-based Carlson Cos., hopes to hike evening traffic with a two-month promotion featuring beef and chicken Oriental stir-fry entrées.

Retailing for $4.95, the beef and the chicken versions are served over a bed of rice and accompanied by a dinner salad and a roll. They will be available until mid-November.

In addition to radio and TV spots, Country Kitchen is touting the stir-fry entrées with its Great Wall of China Sweepstakes, an instant-win game offering an all-expenses-paid trip to Beijing, China, as the grand prize.

Denny's, the family segment's largest player, with 1,300 units, has eliminated its special Grand Slam menu by shifting the items to the chain's standard bill of fare.

"This was done as a convenience to the customer," said a Denny's representative. "Now they won't have to sift through two separate menus."

Included on the menu will be several of the Grand Slam dishes that were introduced earlier this year. The products are intended to lure traffic during all three dayparts and include the "Play it Again Slam," three eggs, three hot cakes and three sausage links, and the "Double Up Slam," a double-decker burger topped with American cheese and grilled mushrooms.

ARA chef battles nature to be tops with tourists

(Continued from page 3)

Alaskan seafood sampler. Entrées include seared salmon fillet with chive butter sauce; grilled halibut steak with broiled oysters, basil and sun-dried tomato vinaigrette; roast prime rib, and grilled chicken breast with roasted Anaheim chilies, red onion and cilantro.

Entrée prices range from $16.95 to $23.50. The signature dessert is the tundra mud pie.

Both the hotel and the resort dining rooms open at 5 a.m. for early buffet breakfasts for visitors who have scheduled 6:30 a.m. shuttle buswildlife-viewing tours into the park's interior. Later breakfasts usually include such Alaskan specialties as reindeer sausage, sourdough biscuits and blueberry pancakes.

The Denali Dining Room at the Denali Park Hotel is somewhat more casual with slightly lower menu prices. The hotel ambience is inspired by a turn-of-the-century railroad depot.

Shebesta, who grew up in the restaurant business at his family's Heidelberger Fass German restaurant in Chicago, is used to working long hours. During the opening month each May, he typically works from 16 to 19 hours a day as he trains new chefs and opens each hotel kitchen. Finding chefs in Alaska is difficult, he commented.

Before transferring to Denali, Shebesta worked for ARA's Mesa Verde National Park operation in Colorado. Before that, he was with The Greenbriar resort, in White Sulphur Springs, W. Va., and Paradise Valley Country Club, in Scottsdale, Ariz.

CORRECTIONS

"NRN's inquiring photographer asks...," Sept. 2, page 8, inadvertently transposed the photographs of Jim Walker, owner of Pasta Mesa, Costa Mesa, Calif., and Bob Mandler, owner of the Chin Chin chain, Santa Monica, Calif.

* * *

In the Aug. 26 issue of NRN the front-page photo accompanying the story titled "Pepsi Giant Hones Image With New Pizza Hut Cafe" had a caption misidentifying the restaurant. The restaurant shown was the prototype Pizza Hut Cafe.

* * *

Readers of Nation's Restaurant News' Top 100 report for 1991, published Aug. 5, may wish to annotate their reference copies to correct the following erroneous or omitted data:

In the table "Top 100 Companies Ranked by U.S. Foodservice Revenue," page 54, a typesetting error resulted in the omission of data for Shoney's Inc., whose 1991 rank is No. 16. The publicly owned company's 1990 rank was No. 15. Projected 1991 revenue for Shoney's Inc., whose fiscal year ends in Oct., is $765.0 million; in the year ended Oct. 1990 its revenue was $764.9 million; in the previous year its revenue was $717.5 million.

In the same table, page 55, the chain holdings of the No. 92 company, JB's Restaurants Inc., were incorrectly listed. The company owns the JB's family-restaurant chain and is a franchisee of the Sbarro chain.

In the table "Top 100 Chains Ranked by U.S. Systemwide Foodservice Sales," page 52, the parent company of the Sizzler chain was imprecisely identified. It is Sizzler International Inc., not Sizzler Restaurants International Inc. The error was repeated in "Alphabetic Directory of Top 100 Chains," page 60.

NEWS

IFMA forecast: No end to sales woes in '92

(Continued from page 1)
improving."

But, he acknowledged, "there is a question of whether we will have a sustained recovery or whether we will have what the economists have called a 'double dip.'"

Technomic is wagering that the improvement will indeed be sustained in 1992. Its foodservice sales forecast is based on a 2.7-percent expansion of the Gross National Product next year, compared with a 0.1-percent contraction in '91.

Disposable personal income — a key gauge of consumer spending — will grow by 2.6 percent in 1992 after shrinking by 0.3 percent this year, according to Technomic.

But the research house is less optimistic in its predictions for the foodservice trade. According to its forecast, all commercial establishments will split a 1.7- percent real rise in sales, to $197.66 billion (excluding the sale of alcoholic beverages), after growing 1.1 percent his year. Non-commercial facilities' intake is expected to grow by an inflation-adjusted 1.2 percent, to $77.89 billion, compared with a '91 gait of 0.4 percent.

Full-service restaurants, fast-food places and commercial cafeterias — a group lumped together by the federal government into a "separate eating places" category — are forecast to post a collective 1.5-percent gain in sales for 1992. This year's intake is projected to grow by only 1 percent.

Fast-food outlets

More than half of that increase — or $4.60 billion, in nominal terms — will come from quick-service places, according to the Technomic data. It forecast that the sector will boost its intake by 2 percent next year, to $78.14 billion, compared with a 1.5-percent gain, to $68.45 billion, in '91.

"There has been more change there, more dynamism, than there ever has been in this industry," remarked Nancy Kruse, principal associate of Technomic. "Value pricing is one big area. The other is menu change and menu expansion," with virtually all the major fast-food chains adding low-cal or otherwise healthful items.

Full-service restaurants are also expected to accelerate their sales growth, with Technomic predicting a 1-percent real gain for 1992 compared with a projected 0.5 percent for 1991.

Noting that many Americans vacationed near home last summer, Technomic vice president Dave Bekermeier commented that "part of the travel helped restaurants, particularly midscale restaurants and particularly those within 400 miles of a major urban center."

Cafeterias' sales were forecast to inch upward by 1 percent after swelling by 1.5 percent this year.

Tough competitors

The researchers forecast that some of the most impressive foodservice sales performances in 1992 would come from retail-based outlets looking to steal customers from conventional restaurants and fast-food places.

In particular, "supermarket delis are an increasingly competitive threat because supermarkets see foodservice as a threat and are merchandising against it," Bekermeier said. In addition to expanding their "menus," the in-store facilities are "looking at faxed orders, they're looking at call-in [service] and in some instances they're looking at delivery, mostly of pizza."

The 22,000 supermarkets currently equipped with delis are expected to garner a total of $6.20 billion this year, for a 6.5-percent real gain over the '90 figure, according to Technomic. It predicted that the outlets' intake will jump by 6 percent next year, to $6.83 billion.

"Their average weekly sales are probably $10,000 to $11,000, excluding bulk foods like meats and cheeses," Bekermeier said. Profits margins are "probably 15 to 16 percent."

Similarly, Technomic indicated that restaurants may face tougher competition from convenience stores because a new breed of "C-store" is sprouting in gas stations. The major oil companies are eagerly adding the retail outlets to pump a few more dollars out of their filling stations.

Such powerhouses as Amoco and Mobil "are well organized, they are well focused and they're willing to get out there and test things," Bekermeier said.

He cited the example of Split Second, a concept that Amoco is developing for its stations. The C-store features an extensive line of deli products.

"Amoco alone has a significant number of sites available," Bekermeier noted. "They've got lots of real estate to play with if they can find the right concept."

Technomic forecast a 1.5-percent real rise in convenience stores' foodservice sales, to $6.64 million, for 1992.

Non-commercial sector

In the non-commercial sector, the research concern foresaw a 1.5-percent rise in traffic at business-and-industry feeding facilities. It projected that the sector will not show any increase in real sales this year.

"The recession has created a lot of problems," Bekermeier said. "A lot of companies have cut their subsidies. There's a lot of pressure in that area."

Health-care feeders are expected to garner just 0.5 percent more business than they drew in 1991, when intake slipped from the prior year by 0.1 percent. Technomic attributed that segment's difficulties to continuing cutbacks in government health-care subsidies.

Traffic at school cafeterias is expected to grow in 1992 by 1 percent, the same gait clocked this year.

College and university feeders are expected to expand their business by 0.5 percent after seeing intake flatten in '91, according to Technomic.

'Cafeteria parents' ease budget crisis at Texas schools

(Continued from page 3)
The volunteer program, unique among Texas public schools, saves the district a minimum of $91,800 annually, said Karen Heitman, R.D. and the program's chief coordinator. The savings are necessary for the district, which, because it is relatively affluent, receives no aid from the federal government's national school lunch program, she said.

"It helps financially," she explained. "We receive no commodities, so the parents are subsidizing us through their labor."

The program, now a longtime tradition, has grown with the school district during the past 75 years, Heitman said. When the first public schools opened here, parents donated meal items for children to eat during the school day. Now Heitman, who compares herself to the center of a spoked wheel, oversees a more extensive and organized operation.

In her role as coordinator, Heitman is responsible for delivering between 3,500 and 3,600 meals daily through the district's cafeterias at four elementary schools, one middle school and one high school. Each cafeteria operates independently, with six salaried cafeteria managers overseeing 32 hourly employees and 60 parent volunteers daily. Each cafeteria also has a volunteer chairman who pays bills and employee salaries for two school years.

The cafeterias resemble mini-Wyatt's Cafeterias for children, Heitman said. Food items are served and sold à la carte, reducing both paper and food waste. Children have a variety of meal choices, including two entrées, a salad bar, ice cream, frozen yogurt and fresh fruit. Each cafeteria assigns its own prices.

Parents sign up to volunteer through the local Parent Teacher Association. The desire to volunteer is so widespread that getting slots can be competitive. Even working parents can participate easily. The 6-square-mile school district, which encompasses schools in both the towns of Highland Park and University Park, is surrounded by the city of Dallas, so working parents can commute from their jobs to and from their volunteer shifts within minutes.

Training is primarily on the job, with special attention paid to meeting county health requirements, said Jane Morrill, the past volunteer treasurer at the high school. "Most mothers and dads know how to serve food," she pointed out. "They're not highly skilled jobs, but they're labor intensive."

For parents, working in the cafeteria provides additional time to see their children and time to interact with teachers, Heitman noted. It also reduces parents' concerns about nutrition and complaints from children that the school food is "yucky," she added.

Michael Boone, this year's school board president, has volunteered in both the middle-school and high-school cafeterias during the past four years.

"Obviously, there are not as many fathers as mothers," he remarked. "But every day there are generally one or two fathers working in the high school and middle school. I like it because I get to see the kids and teachers, and it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that in schools in which there is community involvement there is a higher level of achievement."

The parents' volunteer spirit also increases home values, Morrill explained. "In Highland Park our schools mean everything, and that affects our house values. They reflect a fine school district," she added.

The cafeterias are not for-profit, so sales must cover costs, Heitman pointed out. They generally operate in the black, although they do occasionally fall short, she said. Any profits — which are never astronomical, she noted — go toward equipment, salary increases or purchasing, so that prices remain low. There is no transfer of funds among the cafeterias. Her salary, however, is divided among the six schools and the district.

Although contract feeders have approached the school district for its business, the current program is not likely to change, Heitman said.

"There is a very strong commitment by the parents to having control of the cafeterias," she said. "That's their way of being part of the school."

Parents are adamant about their foodservice roles, and many become foodservice aficionados through the experience, Boone said.

"One of the major food suppliers that do public schools asked the new superintendent if we would consider a third-party vendor to take it over," Boone remarked. "He said, 'I don't think so. The mothers would probably ask to take you over.'"

Morrison buys Movable Feast

(Continued from page 3)
"A lot of corporations that have a contract feeder go to another company to do their off-premises work," Reyer said. "So contractors would want to pick up what corporations are doing off premises. They already have them as clients, so they pick up what clients are doing at home."

At the same time caterers have solicited deeper-pocketed clients, like corporations, to recoup business lost as the recession snuffs out the lavish social events of the 1980s, said Jay Treadwell, president of Movable Feast.

"The market is shifting away from large social events to more utilitarian and pragmatic catering," he commented.

For these reasons, both MCM and Movable Feast officials see their new marriage as heaven made.

"There is a whole level of clients that need catering," Treadwell explained. "Now an institutional foodservice company can provide better catering. It's a rather unique opportunity for one company to be able to provide both sides of that coin. It certainly positions us to aim at that market."

The merger will also provide Movable Feast with capital for growth — a resource made elusive by the recession, Treadwell said.

"It's a good marriage because they are leaving us alone to operate our business," Treadwell pointed out. "And at the same time we have the resources to do better promotions, do better food — improve the company."

Movable Feast, with annual sales of about $2 million, has both catering and retail businesses. Among its catering coups are the Mazda LPGA Champions' Gala Dinner, the Virginia Gold Cup Races and the Goodwill Ball. The company's Corporate Feast division caters for only corporate clients. And Movable Feast at Union Station sells international snacks and quick meals to commuters and tourists.

Under the merger agreement, Movable Feast will retain its identity and remain under the watchful eyes of Treadwell, a renowned caterer and Silver Plate winner, and Stacy DeLano, who is the company's founder and executive vice president. Together, the duo has become known for its personal attention to customers. Movable Feast has 30 employees.

"They bought us because of the people we have here," Treadwell explained. "They wanted a team in place that could carry on with the reputation that they want and that we want."

MCM, with revenues of $379 million for fiscal 1991, provides support services to business, health-care, education, retirement and environmental clients in 38 states.